

Recycling in the Schools

As the school year is ending, I would like to highlight the remarkable recycling accomplishments that have taken place at the Belmont Schools. After a tour of the school buildings in January with the Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds, we identified several potential areas of improvement and developed a plan of action. This plan needed the cooperation of the school custodians, school maintenance workers, principals, lunch staff and teachers - and the above mentioned staff went beyond expectations.

The most challenging accomplishment was the milk carton recycling at the elementary schools. Educating the students to dispose of their lunches differently mid-year was tricky, but the majority of the students caught on. Instead of throwing everything into the trash, students poured off the liquid from milk cartons and juice boxes into a 5-gal bucket with a sieve on top. The sieve helps keep errant straws and food out of the liquid, which makes clean up easier. The students then place their emptied milk carton or juice box into a recycling bin and the rest goes into the trash barrel. As the students were learning this new set-up, the kitchen staff was recycling aluminum and plastic commercial size containers from the kitchen. They were also recycling all of the pizza boxes, which total 147 boxes weekly. Casella, the company that accepts Belmont's recyclables, will accept empty pizza boxes (no food, no liner, but grease stains ok).

This milk carton recycling led to financial and environmental savings. Based on data from the Carton Council, <http://www.recyclecartons.com/> the elementary schools can potentially recycle 118,800 cartons annually. Financially, this saves the Town money by diverting twelve tons of trash (cartons, plus decanted liquid) from the Waste to Energy facility, Wheelabrator, North Andover. The schools save by using approximately 600 fewer garbage bags! Environmentally, the savings can be summed up by stating that twenty-one trees were spared, enough energy was saved to power fifty flat screen TV's for one year and the amount of carbon dioxide avoided was enough to keep nine cars off the road for one month. The Belmont Elementary Schools have done a great job and I can't wait for next year when this is implemented at the middle and high schools.

Another recycling initiative was placing a cardboard dumpster at the high school. Although this proposal was not as complex operationally as the milk carton recycling, it was an essential tool to divert cardboard from the trash. This dumpster enables easier recycling of cardboard since the custodial staff only needs to flatten the cardboard and not cut it up to fit in the truck. Since January when the dumpster was delivered, approximately four tons of cardboard has been recorded as recycled.

The schools have made great progress during the second half of the school year in recycling initiatives. Hopefully next year we will build on these by including the middle and high schools and including more reducing, reusing and recycling proposals.

Reminder: Sustainable Belmont is sponsoring a once yearly discount rain barrel program. Deadline for orders is June 21st. Barrels will be available for pick up Saturday,

June 29th, 9:00 – 11:00AM at the Belmont DPW Yard. For information go to:
<http://www.greatamericanrainbarrel.com/c-98-belmont.aspx>

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at mcalnan@belmont-ma.gov
or 617-993-2689.